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Exit poll: Ukrainian experience*

Exit polls are conducted with voters at polling stations immediately after ballot-casting. Such polls are used in international practices quite frequently, depending on how often events such as elections or referendums are conducted in a given country and on how fierce the political situation is around such events.

To a certain extent, the implementation of this kind of projects is indicative of the level of political culture and democracy developed in a society, especially in the case of former communist countries. This fully applies to Ukraine, where the first ever exit poll was conducted by SOCIS during the 29th March parliamentary election on the order of Ukraine's Media Club and the Democratic Initiatives fund.

The forecasts based on the data obtained from such exit polls are fairly short-lived lasting from the polling stations closing time until the earliest fairly full returns come from the Central Election Commission [CEC]. Further on the data become historical evidence to be analysed and used in the training process.

The main task of exit polls consists in providing forecast estimates on an election just completed and accumulating statistics about the electorate. The major objectives of such polls determine the specific features

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* Revised and shortened authorized translation from the Ukrainian text "10000 vybortsiv buly opytani firmoju "Socis-Gallup" u denj vyboriv: sproba provedennya pershogo Exit poll v Ukrajini", *Sociologija: teorija, metody, marketyng*, 1998, N° 3, pp. 75-88.

of the preparatory stage in which the central requirement is for researchers to obtain accurate and representative data.

It should be emphasised in addition that only this kind of surveys can provide the necessary data to profile adequately the electorate of a party or a bloc of parties. It can also give additional information about the decision-making process, the credibility of the electoral process itself, and a good deal of other valuable information to be further used in projecting the electoral process.

Contemporary international exit poll practices are based on various polling techniques. In particular, the method of respondent sampling can either be quota-based or randomized, the samples may be of various types as well as the sampled populations may vary in size. However, these are, in any case, express polls carried out with the use of advanced and rather expensive telecommunications technologies, data-processing methods, and a knowledge of the types and regularities of voters' electoral behaviour. The main thing here is that at every stage of research there is a data bank available to researchers on the electorate's socio-demographic profile which enables them to control the implementation of a sample and update the data obtained. However, this is by far no guarantee that the researchers will always obtain valid data to produce sufficiently accurate forecasts.

In this particular research practically all of the data mentioned were either totally unavailable or insufficient.

In designing the research, its strategy and tactics were formed under Procrustean conditions predicated on the following mutually exclusive factors:

a) financially constrained research sponsors;

b) requirement of high representation;

c) no official information available on the electorate's profile;

d) reliability of the sociological information collected;

e) inadequate telecommunications systems.

Insufficient funding of a research project has never been seen to make its sampled population more representative, because increasing the representative quality of a research implies not only a larger size of the sampled population but also an increased number of polling [interview] points and their maximized spread in space.

In a similar way, the lack of sufficient financial support makes it impossible to use in the polling process the entire arsenal of facilities to

make the data collected more reliable. Given our faulty communication lines and the shortage of telecomunications facilities in the countryside, the choice of telephone as the main data communication facility implied the possibility of either loss or distortion of research data.

With no data base available at the CEC on the previous and current electorates' socio-demographic profile, albeit in a generalized form, leave alone a break-down by electoral districts and polling stations, the researchers found themselves in a situation where a point of departure for the sampling process could be found only in earlier SOCIS surveys.

These circumstances, on the one hand, increased the risks of getting unauthentic data and, on the other hand, stimulated the use of off-beat solutions in designing the research project.

Speaking about the polling methods used, we focused on the following points:

1) forming sampled population at early selection stages;
2) methods for selecting respondents at polling stations;
3) initial data collection and delivery to the central office.

Forming sampled population at early selection stages. This preparatory phase focused on two tasks:

— identifing population size;
— allocation of polling points [interviewers] (in this case interviewers were placed at polling stations).

Identifying sampled population size. In calculating the size of sampled population researchers were supposed to keep in mind the purpose of this research: primarily, to assess which party or political bloc had won the respondents' votes and extrapolate the data obtained onto the universal set. In so doing, the researchers must take into account the fact that the ballot lists over 30 parties and blocs and it would be highly advisable to identify not only the runners who surpassed the 4-percent barrier but also those who nearly reached it. Hence the magnitude of the item [character, attribute] in question should fluctuate within a very narrow interval of 1-2%. Thus, in calculating the sampled population size we should proceed from the assumption that the share of the item in question should not exceed 1%.

One more circumstance was taken into account: two parallel subsamples were built by quota-based and randomized respondent selection, respectively. The size of each subsample, in view of the above-set tasks, should not be smaller than 5,000 units. Thus, the overall size of the sampled population under given conditions should equal approximately 10,000 units.

Location of polling points. In developing a sampling strategy, researchers were basically guided by a scheme used by SOCIS in nationwide surveys of Ukraine. This sample is of a multi-step and multi-purpose type which enables the use of various schemes of respondent selection at the final stage.

At the first stage of this sample, Ukraine's oblasts (administrative and territorial units) are classified by their types basing on a great number of items and characteristics describing the economic, social and cultural development of such territorial units, the accessibility of culture for the oblasts' population and a number of other items and characteristics directly influencing the formation of citizens' value systems, views, convictions, beliefs, opinions and frames of reference.

Oblast classification is based of the consistent application of two principles: factor and cluster analyses. First thing, factors are formed on the basis of a correlation matrix built on the above-mentioned items and characteristics minus those regarded by experts as secondary and irrelevant and therefore rejected. In the space of these factors all of Ukraine's oblasts are classified with the use of cluster analysis methods. (See: Основные проблемы формирования выборки для опросной сети. [Major problems of sample formation for a polling network] in: Социологические исследования [Sotsiologicheskiye Issledovaniya], № 5, 1990).

The oblasts were categorised and grouped into the folowing regions:

— Kyiv;
— North region (the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Zhytomyr oblasts);
— North-west region (the Volyn, Rivne and Khmelnytsk oblasts);
— West region (the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil oblasts);
— South-west region (the Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia oblasts);
— Central region (the Cherkasy, Vinnytsia, Poltava and Kirovohrad oblasts);
— North-east region (Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts);
— East region (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts);
— South-east region (Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts);
— South region (Odessa, Mykolayiv and Kherson oblasts);
— Crimea, Autonomous Repubic.

Social statistics were used to calculate the percentages of population residing in each of the above-listed regions, and respective proportions of urban and rural populations.

Table 1

Distribution of population by regions (18 year old and up)

REGION	Total population		Urban population %	Rural population %
	('000)	%		
Ukraine	39060	100	67,5	32,5
Kyiv	1893	4,90	100	–
North	3751	9.60	52	48
Centre	5026	12.86	51	49
North-West	2727	7.00	45	55
West	3865	9.89	49	51
South-West	1525	3.90	41	59
North	3400	8.70	70	30
East	6207	15.87	89	11
South-East	5031	12.88	82	18
South	3850	9.85	65	35
Crimea	1780	4.55	70	30

Stage 2 includes selecting inhabited localities: towns and villages. All of Ukraine's towns were divided into five categories depending on the size of their resident population:

Table 2

Population distribution by town categories

Town type	Number of towns	Population size	% of total population
Kyiv	1	2815	9.22
500,000 or more	9	8765	28.70
100,000-499,000	40	8876	29.06
50,000-90,000	55	3785	12.40
Up to 49,000	329	6300	20.62
TOTAL:	434	30541	100.00

The task set at sampling Stage 2 was quite a challenge: on the one hand, to represent the structure of Ukraine's urban communities and, on the other, to represent each of the 11 regions identified at sampling Stage 1. For this purpose, all towns of each region are listed alphabetically for each of the town types given in the above table. Towns are selected randomly. Selection spacing was calculated basing on the amount of urban population to be surveyed in a given region and a preset number of polling points. However, in this particular research there were several specific circumstances to be taken into account.

First, the findings of the company's earlier electoral surveys showed that a maximised spread of polling points was needed to reflect all shades of the country's political map;

Second, a maximum possible coverage of polling stations was needed for the researchers to ensure that the above-mentioned (region- and community-related) specifics of Ukraine's political structure and division are reflected in the sample formed. It was decided that at least 25 voters would be interviewed at each polling station. A lower number of interviewees per polling station would not allow to adequately represent the voters' socio-demographic characteristics and the timing of their appearance at the polls for each polling station. Previous election experience shows certain regularities in voter turnout. Thus, for instance, the previous election to the Supreme Council saw 38% of the voters having cast their ballots by noon, another 27% being registered by 16:00, the total turn-out being 75% of the country's adult population. It was assumed that this voting process pattern is likely to repeat and it was taken as the basis in designing the research project being discussed.

In this way, the researchers established that the survey should cover 400 polling stations. The next task was to divide this number by the regions, and by the types of urban and rural units proportionally to the size of their respective resident population. Yet in so doing, some adjustments were to be made and the numbers of polls both for the regions and communities were rounded off to 25, which is the number of respondents to be interviewed at each polling station.

The selection of polling stations in the countryside was much more problematic. In addition to common-type problems, such as polling station administrators unwilling to have a public opinion poll in their respective constituencies, there were technical difficulties that made it impossible to communicate data to an intermediary or the central office promptly and precisely at a pre-set times.

In general, the principle used in selecting rural communities was much similar to that traditionally used in building a nation-wide multi-stage sample: they are taken from an alphabetic list of the regions in which towns were selected for polling. Then, however, correction had to be made depending on whether there were transport services reaching a community required as well as telecommunication facilities available for the interviewer. In order to avoid adding another correction for the availability of telecommunications facilities, it was decided later on to allow that data from out-of-the-way localities could be supplied somewhat later than the time set, so that the interviewer had enough time after polling to get to town and deliver the returns to an intermediate or the central office in Kyiv.

As was said above, having no information on the 1994 election campaign, such as the size and structure of voter turnout recorded over different time intervals both in the regions and in different types of communities, and no knowledge whatsoever on the electorate socio-demographic structure in the upcoming election, the researchers had to make several assumptions to be either confirmed or refuted by the 1998 election.

The first assumption was that the socio-demographic structure of those who come to the ballot-boxes would be practically identical to the structure of those who voted in the 1994 parliamentary election. As was said earlier, the only source of information on voter structure was data from interviews held by the company shortly after the election.

The only possibility to verify this assumption before it was taken as the basis for sampling was by comparing the demo-social structure of the 1994 turn-out with that of the voters who were going to attend the upcoming election. For comparison, data was taken from a rolling poll, the company's last survey before the election. The socio-demographic characteristics of voters show very little difference. This enabled the researchers to calculate sex and age quotas for respondent interviews at the polling stations both for the whole of Ukraine and for individual regions.

The second assumption was based on the above-cited data on the timing of voters' appearance at the polls in 1994. The researchers assumed the situation of the 1998 parliamentary election will be similar to that of 1994. For this reason, the interviewers had quotas assigned for the number of voters to be interviewed and interview timing.

Preliminary interviews were held with election commission staff members who had worked in rural localities during the previous election

to show that at rural polling stations the voting process normally ends before noon. For this reason the researchers corrected the rural voter interviewing procedure so as to finish by 12:00.

Method for Respondent Selection at Polling Stations

As has been repeatedly pointed out, in building our sample we had no data to lean upon other than the findings of our own research. Having no alternative authentic electorate-related information, we could neither correct (re-weight) the findings obtained by the random respondent-sampling method, nor could we form quotas for cases of quota-based selection.

In view of this, it was decided that half the respondents should be interviewed on a quota basis and half using a randomized scheme. It was presumed that comparison of data obtained in three time intervals by using different methods would make it possible to appraise the reliability of the information being collected. The allocation of a respondent selection method to individual stations was not at random. By this criterion, both sub-samples were similar. This means that in one region, town, or district, the numbers of stations earmarked for quota-based interviewing and for [random] scheme selection were equal. Moreover, if a region had one-type towns, then in one of the towns quota-based selection was used at a centrally located polling station, while in another town it was used at a peripheral station and vice versa.

In case of rural polling stations, half of stations in one administrative district were surveyed by quotas, and half by a random scheme. Thus, the survey used two similar samples with differences being confined only to the last stage.

Primary Information Collection and Delivery to Central Office

Every interviewer was to start interviewing at a polling station at 7:00 AM when the vote opened. In drawing up interviewer's guide for random, not quota-based, respondent selection, researchers made allowance for the circumstance that in using whatever kind of research scheme, the interviewer will be more than normally guided by his/her own likes or dislikes. Therefore, the researchers built their respondent selection scheme basing on this assumption.

When starting work, the interviewer was supposed to identify a voter that he/she "liked" yet let this person go unasked and wait for another 3 voters to leave the polling station. The 3rd voter to go after the "liked" one would be interviewed as respondent No 1. After this the interviewer

would count out another 10 people leaving the station and interview the 11th one. Should the 11th voter refuse to respond, then the next one should be interviewed and so on until the interviewer succeeded. In using this selection method, the interviewer must complete the required number of interviews during a preset time interval.

The interviewers working with a quota scheme were assigned a specific quota.

Three times during the day data from all polling stations were stage-by-stage delivered to Kyiv. After processing the data received, the returns from two different respondent selection methods were compared.

The comparison showed that there were absolutely similar tendencies in the distribution of responses to informative questions and a fairly comparable distribution of voter socio-demographic characteristics. Due to this, data obtained by different methods could be combined at the final stage of data collection.

The validity of the assumptions made and the sampling principles applied were ultimately confirmed by the Central Election Commission as it declared the polls from multi-member constituencies.